

Fishing4Plastic Tournament

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After these finds, everyone grabbed their nets and went to work, finding many patches of seagrass laden with debris. Soon an array of plastic was displayed before us: bottle caps, balloons, ribbon, bottles, jagged pieces of plastic, etc. The group's excitement grew as we gathered these things, especially Ms. Bonnie, who explained that every piece of plastic or debris we found today had truly saved many sea creatures' lives. Mr. Helm also commented how bewildered he is at the number of people who release balloons for special occasions. In our area, these balloons can end up in our ocean and be mistaken for food by an innocent animal.

As our day came close to an end, we enjoyed discussing our findings and eating a good lunch together while taking multiple pictures along the way. Our success continued as Captain Varner spotted another piece of plastic—one of the most surprising we found. When the plastic was pulled up, we all mistook it for a normal plastic baggy. Ms. Bonnie quickly pointed out that it was no ordinary plastic bag, but was instead one of many bags of water that had been sent to Haiti, probably following Hurricane Matthew. Haiti is currently dealing with a huge pollution problem with these empty water bags as they pollute their streams and streets. We were astonished to learn the distances that debris can travel on the ocean currents.

We all settled in our spots for the long trip home, reflecting on what we had learned about this threat to our oceans. As we passed the Cape Lookout lighthouse on the return trip, I realized I wasn't the same person I had been when we started the day. Not only did we do good by gathering the debris, but did it as a true team—one that encouraged and supported one another.

Arriving back at the Maritime Museum in Beaufort, all I could see was joy—teams of former strangers doing what they truly love and helping their planet. One team was named as the winner of the tournament since they collected the most plastic from the ocean. Not only did we all receive prizes for our work, but together the four teams that participated collected 150 pounds of trash—an effort that united us all.

Each piece of plastic we found had its own story, some obvious (like the water bag) and some remaining a mystery. Regardless of how the plastic came to be in the ocean, we must realize the damage it can cause on us as well as the animals that live there. Together we can all lessen the pollution in our waters by educating each other and working together to make a difference.

Courtney Bridge is a senior at West Carteret High School, and is interested in writing and improving the environment. Her participation in the Fishing4Plastic Tournament and the report here are part of her senior project required for graduation. She originally decided to write an article for The Shoreline, and was glad to write about her participation in the Fishing4Plastic Tournament as well. She hopes to attend two years at Carteret Community College and transfer to Western Carolina University to study nursing. Throughout her life, she plans to write poetry and short stories about nature and life as these are the topics that inspire her most.

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December Sudoku

See page 18 for solution.

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